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Child and Youth Empowerment
Academic Literature Review

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Commissioned by

This paper was authored by Dr. Elise Klein, Associate Professor of Public Policy at the Crawford School, the Australian National University, and Dr. Neil Howard, Reader at the Department of Social and Policy Sciences, University of Bath, in the context of a consultancy commissioned by Terre des hommes Foundation (Lausanne) in 2022. The contents of this report reflect the views of the authors.

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Table of Contents

Table of Contents 3

Introduction 5

Research Questions 5

Literature Review Methodology 6

Part 1: An Overview of Empowerment in Contemporary Development and Humanitarianism 7

Synopsis 7

Psychological Empowerment 8

Empowerment as Opportunity Structure 9

Empowerment as Choice and Decision-Making Ability 10

Empowerment as a Collective Process 10

Part 2: Towards a Power-Informed View of Empowerment 12

Section 1: What is Power? 12

Lukes: Visible and Invisible Power 12

Foucault: Power as a Productive Force 12

Structure and Agency Models 13

Coloniality of Power 14

Feminism Up To And Beyond Rowlands: Power's Multidimensionality 15

Gaventa: Spaces and Levels 17

Section 2: Applying Power Theory to Empowerment Practice 18

Mainstream Empowerment as Exclusively Economic 18

Economics as Socio-Economic Empowerment 18

Economics as Psychosocial Empowerment 19

Neoliberal Socio-Political Empowerment 19

Mainstream Empowerment as Overly Individual 19

Individualism Through Socio-Economic Empowerment 20

Individualism Through Psychosocial Empowerment 20

Individualism in Socio-Political Empowerment 20

Mainstream Empowerment as Technical not Political 21

Rendering Technical Through Socio-Economic Empowerment 21

Rendering Technical Through Psychosocial Empowerment 21

Rendering Technical Through Socio-Political Empowerment ... 22
Mainstream Empowerment Lacking Intersectionality ... 22
Intersectionality and Socio-Economic Empowerment ... 22
Intersectionality and Psychosocial Empowerment ... 23
Intersectionality and Socio-Political Empowerment ... 24
Mainstream Empowerment Imposed Top-Down ... 24
Socio-Economic Empowerment From Above ... 24
Psychosocial Empowerment From Elsewhere: Psy-Expertise and Child Development ... 24
Socio-Political Empowerment From Above ... 25
Part 3: Towards a Power-Informed Empowerment Framework ... 26
Where Are We? ... 26
Getting Beyond Where We Are ... 27
Guiding Principles ... 27
Positive Examples Using the Guiding Principles ... 28
1. Working Internally: Challenging the Anti-Politics Machine ... 28
2. Working Structurally: Getting Strategic ... 30
3. Working Intersectionally ... 31
4. Working Intergenerationally: Towards *Protagonismo* and *Colaboraciòn* ... 31
5. Working Collaboratively: From Psychosocial Empowerment to Liberation Psychology ... 32
References ... 34

Introduction

This literature review is the first core deliverable from the Child and Youth Empowerment Consultancy, which seeks to explore what an empowerment-focused, emancipation-oriented NGO might look like and to support Tdh in becoming one. Our primary objectives are:

1. To support Tdh to clarify what it means by 'empowerment'.
2. To support Tdh to further centre empowerment in the work that it does.
3. To centre the voices of children and young people in this process and its outcomes.

We are committed to collaborating closely with Tdh and the children and young people it serves. We aim to learn from Tdh staff and from key stakeholders including children about the benefits and disadvantages of current approaches. And we aim to learn from the best practice documented by the latest and highest quality research.

Our approach to this work is open and critically reflexive. This means that we begin with no starting assumptions, and that we ask fundamental questions such as 'What *is* empowerment?' and 'Why does it matter?'. We believe that this kind of openness is vital if we are to arrive at a model of action that honours Tdh's intention to advance the well-being of the world's children, since it is only through such openness that we can embrace the possibility of doing things differently.

Research Questions

The overarching research questions guiding this project reflect that spirit of open enquiry:

1. What does the latest and best empowerment-related research say about how to operationalise a power-informed approach to child and youth empowerment?
    - What tools and strategies are available or can be developed to support Tdh to operationalise such an approach to empowerment in its work?
2. To what extent is Tdh's work in the domains of Migration, Health, and Access to Justice currently aligned with such an approach to empowerment?
    - How might Tdh better align its work towards this practice in the future?
3. What do key stakeholders, especially children and young people, think about empowerment and Tdh's work in relation to it?
    - How can children and young people inform Tdh's approach to empowerment going forward?

These three Research Questions can be understood as linking directly to this project's three core deliverables: The Academic Literature Review, The Tdh Operational Review, and the Global Model of Action. The present Literature Review aims to respond directly to Research Question 1:

> **What does the latest and best empowerment-related research say about how to operationalise a power-informed approach to child and youth empowerment?**

Literature Review Methodology

We employed two approaches to sampling the literature around empowerment. First, we conducted a systematic literature search using Google Scholar. We chose Google Scholar because its indexing includes various sources that go beyond traditional academic journals. This is significant because although they often point to high quality pieces, purely academic databases tend to exclude voices from the global South who are unable to access established outlets such as Northern journals. Google Scholar also samples grey literature that often fails to make it into journals, such as reports from civil society organisations or recent graduate theses that look at development interventions, which we anticipated to be of use to the present exercise. Following the original ToR for the project, we focused our search on literature exploring the following themes:

- Empowerment:
    - Children's agency and empowerment;
    - Women's empowerment;
    - Socio-economic and educational empowerment;
    - Psychosocial empowerment (including resilience);
    - Socio-political empowerment.
- Human development: rights, relationality, capabilities, needs and wellbeing.
- Power mapping, strategic advocacy and complexity-informed approaches.
- Decoloniality: solidarity and emancipation.

Our search terms included pairs of words such as 'children + empowerment/emancipation' along with specific, relevant phrases such as 'socio-economic empowerment' or 'psychosocial empowerment'. This approach yielded thousands of research results and thus required extensive triage. In order to make the final source list manageable within the time available, we chose to limit inclusion to results in English published within the last 5 years (i.e. since 2017), and we deployed various exclusion criteria to maximise relevance (for example, we excluded health-related results that were specific to Global North hospital-based care). Our penultimate list of potential sources ran into the hundreds, which we triaged further by reading abstracts for potential relevance, arriving at a final source list of 158 pieces. These pieces were all reviewed.

Second, and to make sure that we sampled the most influential texts alongside the most recent, we deployed traditional, purposeful, snowball sampling to gather literature around empowerment that included canonical sources such as the work of Paolo Freire, Myles Horton and the feminist pioneers. In this, we were guided by our existing expertise, the work of senior scholars known to us, and Tdh staff, who generously reviewed draft methodologies and offered suggestions for reading. Critically, this included high-quality 'grey literature' published by sister organisations like Oxfam and Save the Children.

Our review aims to provide a comprehensive outline of contemporary 'mainstream', de-politicising approaches to empowerment as understood and practiced within development and humanitarianism, as well as more critical, radical approaches that have always existed but have become more marginal within institutional practice. Our hope is that this latter body of work will point to possibilities for how Tdh might take forward a critical, emancipatory approach to empowerment in line with the spirit present among so many Tdh staff.

Part 1: An Overview of Empowerment in Contemporary Development and Humanitarianism

Synopsis

A review of the wide literature on empowerment makes overwhelmingly clear that the idea traces its roots back to two intersecting movements – Paulo Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed, and feminist collective practice.

Working in poor regions of Brazil, educator Paolo Freire (1970) developed an approach to what he called '*conscientização*' or 'conscientisation', which can be understood as the development of critical consciousness enabling challenges to oppression (Freire, 1970). Freire's life work concentrated on helping the people he termed 'the oppressed' to understand and act against their subjugation. Specifically, Freire saw conscientisation as a process that makes it possible for structurally marginalized peoples to become aware of the relations of power shaping their oppression, thus making it possible for them to act (in particular, collectively) against these (Summerson Carr, 2003).

Freire ran classes for the Brazilian poor, notably in São Paulo, where he taught and mastered what he would later famously codify as 'the pedagogy of the oppressed'. The conscientisation at the heart of this broadly involved three steps; first, for people to engage in dialogue about their oppression; second, for people to understand the mechanisms of de-humanisation that are at the heart of oppression; and third, using this new critical knowledge and the confidence that acquiring it generates, for people to work towards a new reality through challenging their oppression. As with the sister work of the Highlander Center in the United States (US), especially at the heyday of the Civil Rights Movement (see Freire and Horton 1991), the practice 'supposes that persons change in the processes of changing their relations with the surrounding environment and, above all, with other people' (Martín-Baró, 1994: 41). Conscientisation uses locally relevant approaches to engage with people's oppression, helping them to undo this oppression and to reclaim power.

Meanwhile and during the 1980s, grassroots feminist movements particularly in the global South mobilised against the apolitical community development approaches linked to the 'Women In Development', 'Women And Development', and 'Gender And Development' models. These grassroots feminist movements were inspired by Freire's work (as well as by the work of previous first wave feminists in the global North), but embedded their process in postcolonial feminist critiques that specifically challenged not only patriarchy, but also the mediating structures of class, race, and ethnicity which determined the nature of women's position and condition in the global South (Batliwala 2007).

However, despite these evidently radical roots, the literature reviewed for this paper on the present and past of empowerment, particularly within a development setting, shows that mainstream contemporary practice has become increasingly technical and apolitical, with once emancipatory approaches stripped of their power-awareness and turned into cookie-cutter applications that are easily implemented and measured by the development and humanitarian industries but with little meaningful impact. So advanced is this decline that feminist scholar-activist Srilatha Batliwala, claimed as long ago as 2007 that, 'of all the buzzwords that have entered the development lexicon in the past 30 years, empowerment is probably the most widely used and abused' (p.557; see also Ibrahim 2006 and Alkire

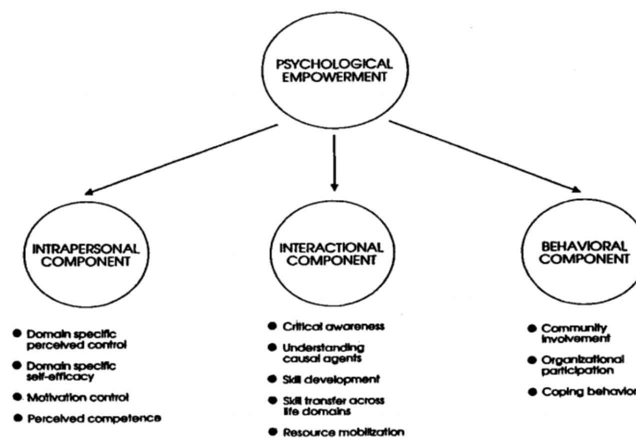
2008). Our review of recent writing confirms this assessment – mainstream contemporary practice appears committed to taking the 'power' out of empowerment.

In our review of the contemporary empowerment literature, we have observed empowerment being discussed in five specific ways; i) as psychological empowerment; ii) as opportunity structure; iii) as decision-making ability; iv) as collective process; and v) as a power-informed struggle aimed at shifting power relations. We briefly review the first four of these but suggest that although they can be useful, they typically miss the vital, fifth piece, which roots empowerment in a critical understanding of *power*. In Part 2, we move on to map social theories of power before applying a 'power-lens' that draws heavily on critical development studies to more fully explore what mainstream empowerment is missing across psychosocial, socio-economic, and socio-political domains. Finally, in Part 3, we offer guiding principles as well as positive examples towards a power-informed approach that an organisation like Tdh can take to (and perhaps even beyond) empowerment.

Psychological Empowerment

The wide literature on psychosocial empowerment typically focuses on the individual skills, capacities, behaviours and processes that people need to develop – such as resilience, self-efficacy, and self-confidence – in order to become empowered. Zimmermann's 1995 model is perhaps one of the most widely known, and it outlines a network of aspects understood to contribute towards psychological empowerment.

Figure 1: Zimmerman's Model of Empowerment and Resilience (1995: 588)



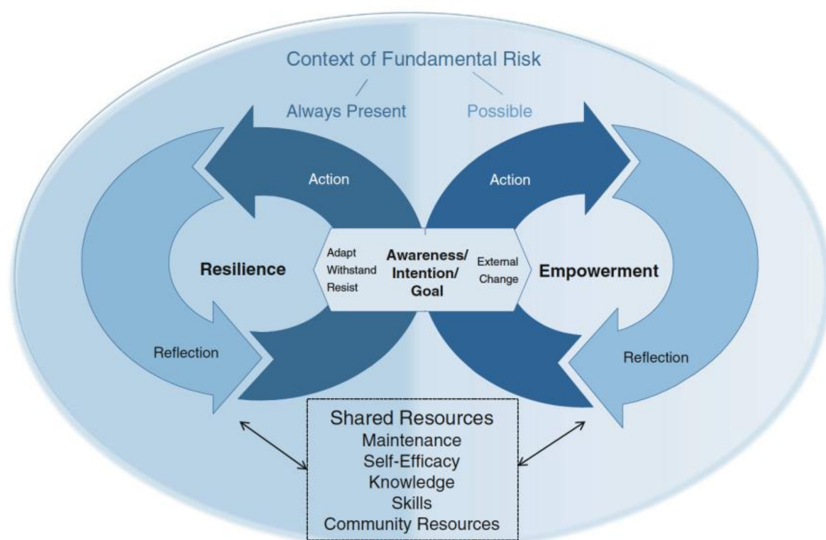
Zimmermann (1995) warns that because psychological empowerment 'manifests itself in different perceptions, skills, and behaviours across people; [as well as] different beliefs, competencies, and actions that may be required to master various settings; and fluctuates over time', psychological empowerment is an 'open-ended construct that is not easily reduced to a universal set of operational rules and definitions' (p.583).

Albert Bandura's (2005) Self-Efficacy Theory has also been significant in thinking around psychological empowerment. Bandura argues that empowerment is 'gained through development of personal efficacy that enables people to take advantage of opportunities and to remove environmental

constraints guarded by those whose interests are served by them' (p.477). Bandura continues that efficacy beliefs have instrumental importance for people, because it is self-efficacy that leads action (Bandura and Schunk, 1981). Efficacy can also relate to different levels of human action. For example, collective efficacy refers to the belief of a group in its own ability (which is not necessarily the same as the sum of individual members' efficacy), while social efficacy refers to an individual's belief that they can create change within their community or society (Bandura 2006).

Brodsky et al. (2013) further this work by identifying the relationship between resilience and empowerment through the development of four interconnecting psychological processes: awareness, intention, action and reflection.

Figure 2: Brodsky's Model of Empowerment and Resilience (2013: 338)



These authors note that whilst resilience and empowerment are different, there is significant overlap between them. They state: 'Resilience consists of internal, local level goals that are aimed at intrapersonal actions and outcomes – adapting, withstanding, or resisting the situation as it is'…[while] Empowerment is enacted socially – aimed at external change to relationships, situations, power dynamics, or contexts – and involves a change in power, along with an internal, psychological shift' (Brodsky et al. 2013: 338-339). Here it is clear that psychological skills (resilience, self-efficacy, and self-esteem) are seen to 'grow' into empowerment when individuals are ready and have the capacity to meet or make the most of events as opportunities and to take positive action. This is echoed by the World Bank's celebrated *Moving Out of Poverty* study, which concluded that for the poor self-belief is vital in being able to take change actions (Narayan et al. 2009).

Empowerment as Opportunity Structure

Alsop et al. (2006) draw on Amartya Sen to frame empowerment as a process comprising both individual agency and a favourable opportunity structure, with the two in constant interaction. Samman and Santos (2009) define opportunity structure as 'the broader institutional, social, and political context of formal and informal rules and norms within which actors pursue their interests' (p.3). Agency both depends on and influences the opportunity structure that defines people's contexts.

Increasing access to resources is often cited as a way to alter people's opportunity structure so as to enhance their empowerment. Resources may include money, income-generating activities, connections, enabling legal frameworks (Hughes et al. 2015) and land allocation (Agrawal 1997). Through increased access to resources, people are assumed to become more able to negotiate, bargain and generate better outcomes for themselves (Agrawal 1997). Increasingly, information and communication technologies (ICTs) are seen as crucial assets in this regard, with research suggesting that ICTs improve economic outcomes (Makananise and Madima 2020) and even facilitate collective action (e.g. Friedman 2005 and Alvarez 2009). Moreover, strategic engagement with print, television, online and social media has been shown to be important for strengthening the visibility and voice of marginalised groups. However, evidence demonstrates that although it may be helpful to intervene in an agent's environment by providing assets such as ICT resources, these assets do not always or necessarily lead to empowerment (Abubakar et al., 2017; Lennie 2002).

Empowerment as Choice and Decision-Making Ability

Choice and decision-making ability are also important elements cited in the literature defining empowerment, in particular as these relate to control over life events and assets. Naila Kabeer (2003), one of the more prominent writers on women's empowerment, argues that empowerment should be understood as a process of change through which 'those who have been denied the ability to make choices acquire such ability'. This implies a change in material and/or social conditions as well as change in one's awareness of the choices available. These choices of course depend on people's capabilities – for example, an illiterate person will have a different realm of choices available than an educated person. Such a dynamic understanding of empowerment applies to the household as well as to life in public spaces such as the market, state, schools, and wider community (Agrawal 1997, Pearse and Connell 2016). However, it has been argued that this understanding must be modified to take account of the value component of the choice, or its intrinsic value (Alkire and Deneulin 2009, Alkire 2008). For example, a woman might not make decisions about minor household chores because she and her husband have decided that this year he will look after domestic matters, while she focuses her attention on political leadership. In this context, not having the choice of when or how the housework is undertaken does not mean that the woman is less empowered.

Empowerment as a Collective Process

The extensive development studies literature on empowerment shows how collective empowerment can further the wellbeing goals of individuals and groups, with great importance for the poor and marginalized (Evans 2002, Ballet et al. 2007, Uyan-Semerci 2007, Ibrahim 2006, Deneulin 2014). Within this literature, collective empowerment is understood as the sum of the individual empowerment of group members, as well as something which emerges within and through collaboration and which takes on a form of its own (Alkire and Deneulin 2002). Critically, the collective capability of a group is viewed by more power-informed scholars as potentially greater than any individual's alone (Ibrahim 2006); it is thus considered vital for wider change (Ostrom 1990 and 1992, Sen 1999). This includes change to restrictive social norms, either through contestation or through within-group development of alternative norms (Fukuda-Parr 2003). Collective empowerment can therefore be seen as having intrinsic and instrumental value to the wellbeing of group members (Heyer et al. 2005, Cleaver 2007).

Each of these approaches to empowerment has its merits, though it is clear that all lack deep engagement with power and its relationship to structure. It is to this that we now turn.

Part 2: Towards a Power-Informed View of Empowerment

What is power? And how does it work? In order to develop a more power-informed view of empowerment, Section 1 will provide an overview of recent power theory. Section 2 will then put this to work in analysing mainstream approaches to and understandings of empowerment, drawing on power theory as well as critical development scholarship informed by that theory.

Section 1: What is Power?

Power is a widely used but often undefined concept within the social sciences, with one of its most celebrated theorists, Steven Lukes, describing it as an 'essentially contested concept' (1974, 2005: 137). Building on the very basic notion of power as the capacity to produce an effect, classically (and in many contexts accurately), power has been understood in zero-sum, binary terms, as 'power over': the capacity for A to get B to do something that A wants, even if B does not necessarily want to. Typically, this form of power is seen as underpinned by force – the threat or use of violence in the case of non-compliance. This form of power – often equated with the sister concept of domination (see Scott 1990) – is undoubtedly widespread and is perhaps the form most commonly targeted in efforts to foster empowerment amongst marginalised groups (Moser 1993, Rowlands 1997). Yet more recent theories of power have developed greater sophistication in accounting for the invisible as well as visible ways in which domination is secured, while others have gone beyond the traditional binary understanding to theorise power in more fluid and indeed positive terms.

Lukes: Visible and Invisible Power

Steven Lukes (1974, 2005) begins his theorising with a generic definition of power as the capacity of A to affect B in a manner contrary to B's interests. This presupposes conflict over outcomes and aligns with the basic, zero-sum notion of power as coercive influence, which Lukes refers to as power's 'first dimension'. However, Lukes recognises that power can operate in hidden fashion, with individuals and groups able to 'shape the agenda' such that implicit or latent conflicts (for example over the distribution of resources) do not get a public hearing. Lukes sees this as the 'second dimension' of power, and he recognises that it can operate in invisible ways – for example, those who set the agenda might do so behind closed doors, with 'being in the room' itself a significant element of their power. Lukes' 'third dimension' is what he describes as 'the most effective and insidious', which involves surreptitiously conditioning the mindset of the dominated such that they 'choose' their domination or accept it as un-changeable. Lukes was heavily influenced here by the lineage of thinkers from Gramsci who analysed the manufacturing of consent.

Foucault: Power as a Productive Force

Working in parallel to Lukes was Michel Foucault, who has been described as '*the* most influential theorist of power of the late 20th century' (Gaventa 2003: 1). Foucault was initially concerned with state and other forms of official power and theorised two broad types of its deployment. First, coercive or 'disciplinary power' of the kind that compels people to behave in certain ways through sanction or its threat. This corresponds closely with Lukes' first dimension. Second, 'productive power', which involves educating people's desires and configuring their habits, aspirations and beliefs, 'artificially arranging things so that people, following only their own self-interest, will do as they ought' (in Li 2007: 5). This overlaps with Lukes' third dimension and again builds on the lineage of thinkers from

Gramsci who seek to understand the mechanisms through which the dominated are inclined to accept their domination.

Yet Foucault also developed a number of ideas that would fundamentally re-shape power theory. First, building on the notion of power as 'productive', he argued that power should not be seen as a discrete, finite 'entity' of which some people possess a stock while others do not. Rather, he saw power in terms of flow, as a relational force moving through and constituting social reality. He argued:

> 'Power must be analysed as something which circulates, or rather as something which only functions in the form of a chain. It is never localised here or there, never in anybody's hands…And not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing or exercising this power' (in Gordon and Foucault 1980: 84).

Second, following from this departure, Foucault elaborated the then counter-intuitive idea that power is not always 'bad'; rather, as an inevitable, ubiquitous, social force, it is both unavoidable and *necessary*. Third, this necessity manifests itself in the constitutive role that power plays in the formation of human subjectivity[1], along with agency, including to resist oppression and domination.

Structure and Agency Models

Agency, its enabling factors, and the many constraints to it also sit at the heart of the various 'structure-agency' models of social relations, which have important things to contribute to an understanding of power. These models range from the sociology of Giddens (1984) and Bourdieu (1977) to the Marxist-inspired post-structuralism of Laclau and Howarth (Laclau 1990, Critchley and Marchart 2004, Howarth 2013) via the feminist intersectionality of Crenshaw (1991) and hooks (1999). Put simply, these varied theories are united by the postulate that structures and agents require and recreate each other, without either ever being 'complete'. Structures are seen as real, observable, relatively stable configurations that give shape to and are in turn comprised by the individuals that recreate and resist them. By contrast, agents are understood as beings born into crisscrossing and often contradictory structures; these structures condition their subjectivity and many of their actions by shaping behaviour and beliefs, yet their incompleteness and the contradictions between them enable agentive contestation, challenge and the struggle for alternatives.

Three important questions arise from this theoretical starting point: 1) What are the key structures? 2) How does power fit within them? And 3) How is resistance possible? As is argued by a vast array of social theorists, the core structures or systems organising our social world include capital, race, caste, gender, generation and sexuality. Each of these works on the basis of binary hierarchizations which mediate access to material or symbolic resources and map onto normative understandings of good/right/normal vs. bad/wrong/abnormal. These binaries can be seen in the table below:

[1] Judith Butler took this idea forward in her celebrated 1997 book, *The Psychic Life of Power*, in which she argued that 'A power exerted on a subject, subjection is nevertheless a power assumed by the subject, an assumption that constitutes the instrument of that subject's becoming'.

Table 1: The Hierarchical Binaries of Social Structure

'Good/Right/Normal'	'Bad/Wrong/Abnormal'
Rich, Capitalist	Poor, Worker
White	Black
Upper Caste	Lower Caste
Male	Female, Trans, Non-Binary
Heterosexual	Homosexual, Non-Binary
Old	Young

The systems enabled by these binaries have historically organised (and been used to organise) privilege and inequality. Although frequently publicly challenged in liberal democracies, their implicit structuring power nevertheless plays out in the constitution of the institutions and practices that govern our day-to-day lives, constraining opportunities for some whilst creating possibility for others.

What role does power play within this framework? Power is conceived of in two ways – through the metaphors of 'stock' and 'flow'. As per Foucault, power is seen to flow impersonally through social relations as a force that re-creates both our governing social structures and the hierarchies and inequalities they underpin, whilst also enabling the subjectivity and agency of resistance. In addition, power is conceived in the more traditional terms of a stock that people can accrue and deploy. One of the best-known ways of making sense of this stock is through Bourdieu's concept of 'capital'. Capital, Bourdieu argues, commonly comes in four generic forms (Bourdieu 1986): '*economic* (money and property); *cultural* (information, knowledge, and educational credentials); *social* (acquaintances and networks); and *symbolic* (legitimation, authority, prestige)' (Swartz 2013: 34–5). Different actors within the social field possess different amounts of these capitals and use them in the struggle to establish or challenge dominance. Predictably, the ability to acquire them depends in large part on one's position(s) within the social matrix.

How is resistance thought possible within this theoretical framework? Under two primary conditions. The first is cognitive and requires a moment of rupture when people have the opportunity to recognise the constructed nature of social relations and thus the possibility of their being different. This idea overlaps with Feminist, Critical Race and Standpoint Theories (e.g. Mills 1998, Batliwala 2019), as well as with Freirean understandings of empowerment, all of which argue that critical consciousness can be fostered when confronted with society's contradictions. This analysis further parallels more structural-materialist accounts of social change (e.g. Harvey 2014), which see crises as immanent in capitalism and view the ruptural moments these generate as a necessary precondition for the emergence of critical consciousness. Building on that consciousness, the second condition for resistance is of course the development and deployment of the various forms of power/capital articulated by Bourdieu. We will return to a variation on this point below.

Coloniality of Power

Before going any further, however, we wish to complete our discussion of structure with a word on the coloniality of power. While the colonial period has all but ceased, the targeting of the subjectivities of the racialised 'Other' continues through what postcolonial scholarship refers to as 'coloniality'. Coloniality is different to colonialism, which is about the taking of sovereignty for empire (Maldonado-Torres 2007). Coloniality instead refers to the:

> 'Long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labour, intersubjectivity relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations. Thus, coloniality survives colonialism. It is maintained alive in books, in the criteria for academic performance, in cultural patterns, in common sense, in the self-image of peoples, in aspirations of self, and so many other aspects of our modern experience. In a way, as modern subjects we breathe coloniality all the time and every day' (Maldonado-Torres, 2007: 243).

Coloniality is an ongoing process of ordering relations based on perceived racial difference, stemming from the colonial period. Coloniality also involves constituting the structure and control of labour, resources and modes of production, upholding Western hegemony in a world order of difference (Quijano 2000). Furthermore, coloniality has a specific mode of being – one that projects the inferiority of subjectivities not subscribing to the norms of the West (Maldonado-Torres 2007: 243). Coloniality thus has significance in global processes of development and humanitarianism as it codifies the relations underpinning those targeted as needing to be 'improved', 'supported' or 'empowered'.

Disrupting coloniality has a focus on epistemological decolonization, and the disrupting of the global 'colonial unconscious' (Ming Dong Gu 2020: 599) that accepts the Western status quo as the norm. Attempts in this direction require that we recognise the deep historical, cultural and political economic bases of the contemporary world order. They further require de-centring Western thought and creating space to re-think the world *from* Latin America, *from* Africa, *from* Indigenous places, and *from* marginalized academia in the global South (Grosfoguel 2011). Decoloniality is further about structural transformation – challenging the racializing, globalising structures of capitalism that underpin continued exploitation and expropriation, with some (non-white) bodies rendered 'exploitable' while other (white) bodies receive protection (Robinson 1983, Bhattacharyya 2018).

Feminism Up To And Beyond Rowlands: Power's Multidimensionality

Of all the various strands of social theory looking at power, empowerment and its relation to structural (including decolonial) transformation, arguably the most effective, succinct and accessible distillation comes from writers within the feminist tradition, particularly as they have combined this theory with insights from psychology and their own organising practice (Crenshaw 1991, Rowlands 1997, Batliwala 2019, Rowlands 2020, Bradley 2020). Jo Rowlands' 1997 book, *Questioning Empowerment*, is seminal in this respect. In it, Rowlands argues that power has four principal forms:

> 1) *Power over*, which can be understood as the traditional, most widely experienced form of power as coercion or control, and which may generate compliance or resistance.
>
> 2) *Power to*, which can be seen as productive or generative power, enabling actions including organisation for change.
>
> 3) *Power with*, which can be understood as a relational form of power that develops when groups come together to form wholes greater than the sum of their parts. This is widely seen as essential for collective action.

4) *Power from within*, which is variously understood in terms of spiritual strength, resilience and motivation, all grounded in a sense of dignity, self-respect, self-worth and self-belief.

Each of these forms of power can be grown and diminished. They interact and their interaction may trigger feedback loops that foster action and at times repressive reaction. As an example, imagine a political worker who organises a gathering in a disadvantaged community to talk about local authority plans to sell the park. Through attending the first and then subsequent meetings, speaking and being heard, people in the community begin to develop a sense of *power within*, which manifests in confidence and motivation. The collaborative space that emerges fosters their *power with* and this ultimately expresses itself in the *power to* organise a community protest against the park sale. In the end, we might imagine this ending in victory, with the local council's *power over* weakened through a legal commitment to protect the park's future.

The intersectional feminist organising collective, *Just Associates*, have used this model of power to support women organisers all over the world for more than two decades. Through this work, they have arrived at what they argue is a fifth form of power that needs to be added to the model – *power for*. In Bradley's words: power for 'refers to the combined vision, values and demands that orient our work. It inspires strategies and alternatives that hold the seeds of the world we seek to create' (2020: 108). In this, it echoes Martin Luther King's linking of power to purpose (in Bradley 2020: 103), and underpins what Just Associates see as *Transformative Power* (ibid. 108; see also Gaventa 2021)

Figure 3: Just Associates' View of Transformative Power

BOX 3.1.2 TRANSFORMATIVE POWER

Power within

Power within has to do with *a person's sense of self-worth and self-knowledge*. Grounded in a belief in inherent human dignity, *power within* is the capacity to value oneself, think independently, challenge assumptions and seek fulfilment. Effective grassroots organising efforts help people affirm personal worth, tap into their dreams and hopes, and discover their *power to* and *power with*.

Power to

Power to refers to *the unique potential of every person to speak, take action, shape her life and world*. Leadership development for social justice provides new skills, knowledge and awareness, and opens up the possibilities of joint action, or *power with* others. Nurturing people's *power to* is a critical antidote to resignation and political withdrawal.

Power with

Power with refers to the collective strength that comes with **finding common ground and community with others.** *Power with* – expressed in collaboration, alliances, and solidarity – multiplies individual talents, knowledge and resources for a larger impact.

Power for

In recent years, JASS has added *power for* as a dimension of transformative power. It refers to the combined vision, values and demands that orient our work. It inspires strategies and alternatives that hold the seeds of the world we seek to create. *Power for* provides a logic to transformative power – motivating the sustained movement-building efforts that generate *power to, with* and *within* as building blocks for change.

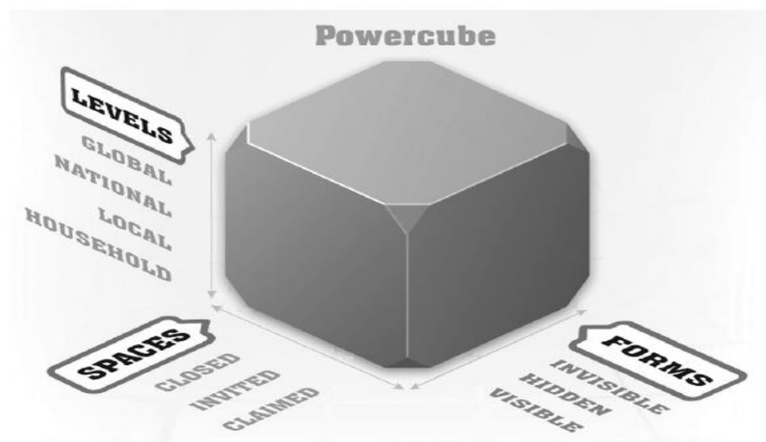
(Definitions of power within, power with *and* power to *are adapted from Miller et al. 2006, p. 6; the definition of* power for *is the author's own.)*

Crucially, this vision of transformative power is oriented towards overcoming inequality and domination, towards building a world in which the structures and systems that we inhabit foster well-being and flourishing. Like Freirean pedagogy before it, then, it is a politicised, collective form of power that moves through but goes beyond the individual transformation that has become the focus of many attempts to foster 'empowerment' in development contexts. In this respect, it ties in with both community organising and liberation psychology, which each put 'relational power' at their heart (see Chananiah 2019) and aim to change the relations determining 'who gets what, who does what, who decides what, and who sets the agenda' (Batliwala 2019: 15)[2].

Gaventa: Spaces and Levels

A final important theorist of power for our purposes is John Gaventa, who was once a PhD student of Steven Lukes and subsequently director of the famous Highlander Center that brought Paolo Freire and his ideas to North America. Having both studied and trained generations of activists in empowerment strategies, Gaventa has come to approach 'transformative power' in much the same way as feminist organisations like Just Associates, with five dimensions that interact and overlap[3]. Where he has innovated, however, is in codifying what he terms the 'forms, spaces and levels' of power into a framework for power analysis called *The Powercube*. Pictorially, the Powercube is represented using the visual metaphor of The Rubik's Cube (from Gaventa 2020: 119):

Figure 4: The Powercube



[2] Interestingly, Batliwala additionally argues for consideration of a sixth form of power, called *power under*. Developed by psychoanalyst, Steven Wineman, 'power under' refers to the ways in which people who have experienced discrimination, abuse, and oppression become abusive, authoritarian, and oppressive themselves when they gain power, as a consequence of their un-healed trauma. This points to the importance of creating healing, supportive spaces in the process of building transformative power.

[3] Indeed, he states: 'In this more unified approach, these forms of power can be seen as interrelated, such that empowerment becomes a process through which relatively powerless groups develop a sense of power within, and the capacity for power with others, in order to challenge the power over their lives, and gain the power to determine their own futures, guided by their vision of a different world, as in power for' (2021: 113).

The forms of power in this framework refer to how power manifests, whether it is visible, as in governmental fora, hidden, as in the use of back-door channels to influence decision-makers, or invisible, in the way that corporate media establish social 'truths'. The spaces are about where power is exercised, which fora it is exercised in, or which moments, opportunities and channels may open up. These can be closed, as in many corporate boardrooms, invited, as in consultative settings established by local authorities, and created or claimed as happens when social movements emerge and make gains. Finally, the levels of power relate to decision making scale and authority and can include anything on the spectrum from the household to the global.

Gaventa is clear that all these categories should be seen as dynamic, shifting spectra, evolving as contexts and social forces change. Necessarily, they are also shaped by the major structures underpinning inequality and established power relations, as well as by the moments of structural crisis that make these shake. Likewise, they are impacted by the accumulation of forms of power by subordinate groups who seek to challenge the status quo. We will return to how such challenges might better be supported by organisations like Tdh later in this paper.

Section 2: Applying Power Theory to Empowerment Practice

Armed with the insights of power theory, then, and with the addition of power-informed perspectives from critical development studies, let us now return to the literature on empowerment. We will outline five critiques of the ways in which mainstream approaches and understandings tend to fall short, primarily through their failure to acknowledge or meaningfully engage with power relations and their structurality.

Mainstream Empowerment as Exclusively Economic

Of the 158 titles we reviewed during our Google Scholar search, close to half related to empowerment understood in strictly economic terms. That is, to individuals (predominantly women and occasionally children) either a) increasing their incomes, or b) diversifying their income sources by becoming entrepreneurs. A significant body of this work examined rural women's participation in Self-Help Groups (SHGs) or micro-credit initiatives, with both SHGs and access to micro-credit broadly evaluated as useful mechanisms for improving incomes and fostering entrepreneurship (e.g. Bai 2019, Maina 2020).

Economics as Socio-Economic Empowerment

In certain respects, an economic focus makes sense – control over (increased) resources is a necessary component of empowerment within capitalism for those typically excluded from access to wealth. Yet, as Hamilton notes (2019: 18), the reduction of empowerment to mean 'economic gain and access to material resources' reflects a gutting of the initial radical, structural, relational understanding of the term, along with its colonisation by neoliberal ideology, as encapsulated in the International Monetary Fund's field-defining position that empowerment '"is key for [economic] growth both through the direct impact of the size of the labor force on output and through the impact of productivity" (International Monetary Fund, 2018, p. 5)'. This frames empowerment as better adjustment to the dominant system rather than as a process of transformation beyond it, which would include challenging the power relations that underpin it.

Economics as Psychosocial Empowerment

Whilst scholars understand and use the term neoliberalism in various ways (Ferguson 2010), we understand neoliberalism as a form of governmentality based on the 'economization of life', which sees and manages social complexity through the lens of economic logic (Brown 2015). This has huge implications for the individual who is required by that governmentality not only to operate in line with market logic but to reconfigure their behaviour and subjectivity so as to become the rational, self-sufficient, economic actor critically referred to as *homo economicus* (McMahon 2015). Importantly, our review of psychosocial empowerment initiatives makes clear just how frequently these fall into the bracket of such governmentality – promoting entrepreneurship, teaching financial literacy, and imparting the skills and dispositions that enable better adaptation (rather than challenge) to the logics of market life (Gershon, 2011). As Schram powerfully puts it, this 'economistic-therapeutic-managerial' approach:

> '…imputes to the poor the identity of self-interested, utility-maximizing individuals who need to be given the right incentives so that they will change their behaviour and enable the state to better manage the problems of poverty and welfare dependency. This discourse concentrates almost exclusively on disembodied information on individual behaviour as the primary way to isolate the causes of poverty and develop solutions' (2000: 4).

Attempts to fix psyches and change behaviour foreclose analysis of broader relations of power and coloniality within the global economy and within both the development and humanitarian industries themselves.

Neoliberal Socio-Political Empowerment

Because of its tendency to govern human action through market logics, neoliberalism often reduces the socio-political domain to one of individual or depoliticised collective action that seeks accommodations with rather than challenges to market life (Madra and Adaman 2013). In empowerment terms, this translates into simplistic initiatives to promote 'voice' or so-called 'participatory spaces' in which the young can air their views to the powerful. Perhaps the classic example of this is the International Labour Organisation's (ILO) inclusion of (select groups of) children in its Global Child Labour Conferences. These conferences bring together key policy actors committed to ridding the world of child labour, usually through measures such as banning children's work, increasing schooling, or providing better jobs for adults. Completely off the table are questions about whether and how to overhaul global capitalism. The children permitted to attend, therefore, are typically hand-picked supporters of this de-politicising approach, while unionised movements of working children are actively excluded, since they seek both an improvement in children's working conditions *and a challenge to the capitalist underpinnings of all bad work* (Taft 2019, Van Daalen and Hanson 2019, Van Daalen 2020, Van Daalen and Al-Rozzi 2022). In the words of critical childhood studies scholars Vicky Johnson and Andy West, true empowerment, therefore, like true participation, requires 'going beyond voice' (2018).

Mainstream Empowerment as Overly Individual

A second reductive tendency that our literature review documented is the tendency of mainstream approaches to 'empowerment' to be primarily *individualistic*. Of the recent literature we reviewed, for

example, a small sub-set looked at empowerment as a collective, relational, political process of individual-within-collective transformation. But by far the majority of texts treated empowerment as a process that only individuals go through, sometimes via personalised intervention plans that aim to increase wealth or psychosocial resilience, and sometimes via group initiatives that deploy group-ness only as a vehicle for personal change (Klein and Mills 2017). In either case, the focus on collective efforts for *structural-political* change was almost non-existent.

Individualism Through Socio-Economic Empowerment

The tendency of empowerment to be overly individualistic is apparent in all of the work we reviewed on SHGs, with Sultana et al.'s 2017 article paradigmatic in that it treats SHG membership as no more than a binary variable in regression analysis of relative levels of women's economic empowerment. Similar things are found in the work on resilience. Hammad and Tribe's 2020 analysis of a livelihood intervention in Gaza, for example, focussed specifically on the individual impact of an economic empowerment programme that gave seven Palestinian graduates a job. Findings were positive – they documented '(1) economic empowerment, (2) psychological benefits (e.g. hope, confidence and improved morale) and (3) [that] income generation fosters psychosocial empowerment' (p. 1). Yet remarkably, given that this intervention took place in a context of structural, militarised, colonial oppression, nothing about it either sought to enhance or succeeded in enhancing relational or collective power (see also Hart 2022, discussed further below).

Individualism Through Psychosocial Empowerment

The impacts of individualising psychosocial empowerment are very similar to the processes involved in the economisation of psychosocial empowerment. Psychology's lack of engagement with critical literature, and with resistance to psy-expertise from those who have lived experience of it, risks contributing to the increasing trend of conceptualising development through psychotherapeutic registers that emphasise individual, psychological, and pharmaceutical, rather than structural, remedies. This overlooking of structural transformation tends to manifest in conceptualisations of development as 'a problem of the mind': a psychological rather than a structural issue. For example, the World Bank's 2015 World Development Report, *Mind, Behaviour and Society*, constructed poverty alleviation as a matter of empowering people by promoting positive psychology and behavioural economics. Rather than offering structural measures for tackling structural issues such as poverty and disadvantage, the interventions suggested in the report focus entirely on the individual behavioural and psychological attributes of people in the global South (Fine et al. 2016, Klein 2017).

Individualism in Socio-Political Empowerment

Similarly, with regards to socio-political empowerment, there is a clear trend within the literature and the approaches that it documents towards individualisation. At one level, as argued above, this can be seen in work on children's participation and voice. Typically, 'participation' involves the tokenistic platforming of individual children taught to speak in terms of their individual human rights, as at the Global Child Labour Conferences. Likewise, 'voice' initiatives tend to break down into simplistic civics programmes that teach children about voting or public speaking. But rarely are ever children taught about histories of struggle, about collective action, or about how to organise. In her research into this matter, the celebrated scholar of child activism, Jessica Taft, has concluded that it is because 'the children's rights paradigm is rooted in a liberal model of civic participation', which problematically 'emphasises individual participation and voice…at the expense of collective action' (Taft 2019: 115).

We may add to this observation that the individualisation of socio-political empowerment also manifests in initiatives that treat collective or group action instrumentally, as no more than a vehicle for individual change. The literature on women's empowerment documents this tendency clearly. Women's participation in group activities is promoted as a way to increase self-belief and confidence, since this may in turn translate into greater bargaining power in the home (e.g. Rowlands 1997). Rarely, however, is such participation constructed either in terms of struggle for structural change or in terms of the intrinsic as opposed to instrumental value that participants in collective action derive. This is despite the significant psychological (e.g. Ibrahim 2006, Alkire and Deneulin 2009) and social movement literature (e.g. Poma and Gravante 2019) demonstrating how transformative participation in collective action can be.

Mainstream Empowerment as Technical not Political

Perhaps more than anything, the key problematic within mainstream approaches to empowerment is *a tendency towards de-politicisation*. As we will go on to discuss below, the critical humanitarianism and development studies literatures are united in assessing hegemonic approaches to intervention (including empowerment intervention) as *technical*.

Rendering Technical Through Socio-Economic Empowerment

To render technical is to de-politicise, and scholars of neoliberal governmentality argue that this is an inherent part of social and development work in the contemporary era (Burchell et al. 1991, Foucault 2007 and 2008). Rather than tackling the underlying causes of the phenomena they problematise (including unequal and oppressive power relations), hegemonic approaches work by attempting to equip beneficiaries with the tools to better endure those phenomena. In this sense, they construct political problems as technical issues that can be 'fixed' if only the inputs are gotten right (Howard and Okyere 2022). Micro-credit is perhaps the paradigmatic example of this. Constructed as a pillar of women's economic and social empowerment, micro-credit and micro-finance offer the promise of freedom through financial inclusion. Yet this implicitly presumes that the system in which one is included is unproblematic, which ample research on the abuses of capitalism calls into question. Micro-credit can thus be understood as promoting the global spread of *homo economicus*, with research documenting considerable negative impacts for women alongside the benefits deriving from access to credit (Mader and Duvendack 2015, Gabor and Brooks 2017)

Rendering Technical Through Psychosocial Empowerment

The acute focus on the individual and the de-politicization of social life through psy-expertise can lead to analysis focusing on individuals' choices, skill sets and behaviours, rather than, or more than, structural change. This discourse concentrates almost exclusively on individual behaviour and attributes as the primary way to enact agency and develop solutions. The problematizing of psyches and behaviour forecloses analysis that includes agency as resistance and subversion to development and humanitarian interventions, as well as honouring the agency, reliance and efficacy already there, and often beyond Western middle-class notions of flourishing. Moreover, this individualization of poverty obscures broader relations of power and coloniality within the global economy and within both the development and psy industries themselves. Jason Hart's resilience-focussed chapter in the recent book, *International Child Protection: Towards Politics and Participation*, offers a case in point. Hart

begins by documenting the manifold abuses that children face at the hands of the Israeli state and settlers in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, ranging from denial of schooling to violent house arrests, up to and including rights violations that target children '*explicitly* as children' (2022: 201). However, Hart continues:

> 'The protection efforts routinely offered by the main UN and international agencies at the time of our fieldwork did not address these issues in a systematic manner. Moreover, the focus on prevention of violations was spasmodic. Our research revealed that *the major part of protection work in this setting consisted of efforts intended to ease the impact of occupation-related violence or to help the healing process of children who have suffered harm*. This work included a significant focus upon psychosocial programming' (ibid. 202, emphasis added).

Empowerment-as-coping is arguably a form of technical de-politicisation par excellence, since it aims to support people to better deal with the consequences of (often violent) inequality, rather than to challenge the power relations that sustain it. While this is commonly seen in psychosocial interventions, the extensive recent child labour literature demonstrates that it is far from confined to the psychosocial (e.g. Maconachie et al. 2022).

Rendering Technical Through Socio-Political Empowerment

Critical development studies literature warns that socio-political empowerment can act as a form of technology subsumed within institutional and neoliberal constructs of freedom. Cruikshank (1999) studies 'technologies of citizenship', from welfare rights struggles to philanthropic self-help schemes and the organised promotion of self-esteem awareness in America. She is sceptical of the potential for institutionalising liberation and empowerment, seeing the empowerment of citizens through associations as more likely to lead to subjection to state or development industry power than to real emancipation. Cruikshank's caution regarding ideas of emancipation within institutional environments is reasonable given what we know about wider processes of knowledge production and the relations of power in social policy as well as in the development and humanitarian industries.

Mainstream Empowerment Lacking Intersectionality

A further significant limitation in empowerment practice that our literature review made clear is the tendency for empowerment initiatives to lack an intersectional focus. Intersectionality can be understood as an analytical framework for making sense of the multiple, overlapping vectors of identity along the lines of which privilege and inequality are organised (e.g. Crenshaw 1991). These include the structural social markers identified in Section 1, such as race, class, caste, generation and gender.

Intersectionality and Socio-Economic Empowerment

A significant body of critical, feminist and postcolonial scholarship has analysed the ways in which those markers intersect to compound people's disadvantages (e.g. Sayer 2005, hooks 2009), with structural forces such as white supremacy, patriarchy, and capitalism playing out through and reinforcing inequalities between peoples categorised differently. Crucially, this scholarship emphasises the importance of working to address *all* such systems of domination, paying attention to the ways in which these intersect and compound each other (see Kashtan 2015). Yet traditional empowerment

practice within development and humanitarianism tends almost universally to focus on only one or two dimensions at a time – typically the economic and gender dimensions – often to the detriment of supposed beneficiaries. This has been documented most extensively in relation to women's empowerment, with efforts to increase women's power reduced to zero sum trade-offs against the men in their lives, at times occasioning backlash and regularly provoking alienation (Rowlands 1997, Batliwala 2007). Such tendencies have also been documented in relation to children's empowerment, particularly as it overlaps with child protection. To offer one salutary example: Jaremey McMullin's recent research with de-mobilised former child combatants in West Africa revealed that efforts to reintegrate these young people and establish their economic independence often failed because they constructed children as victims of adult abuse who needed rescue *from* exploitative adults rather than as agents who made complex decisions *with* adults to participate in war partly in order to overcome their poverty (2022). The challenge for empowerment, then, is to engage with social complexity rather than reduce it to simplistic and oppositional binaries of 'powerful' and 'powerless'.

Intersectionality and Psychosocial Empowerment

Often in development and humanitarian practice, it is thought that integrating psychological theories represents an innovation. This is problematic because it assumes that development did not draw upon psy-expertise prior to being 'psychologised', thus overlooking the historically co-constitutive history of development and humanitarianism with psy-expertise[4]. For example, whilst psy-expertise largely developed in Europe (and later in North America), its growth into a universalising and biologizing discourse has its origins in the colonial psy-science of the late 19th Century (Fanon 2008/1952). Psy-expertise was crucial to the success of the colonial enterprise, in part because psychologised explanations for dissent were 'far preferable [to those in power] to economic and political analyses that might find colonial practices to be culpable" (Mahone, 2006: 250). The use of psy-expertise as a colonial tool and legacy in many parts of the global South and in current settler colonies is well documented (Dudgeon et al. 2012).

Today, we see a proliferation of psy-expertise in contemporary development and humanitarian interventions, from the mobilization of psy-expertise within disaster response and humanitarian discourse, and the therapeutics of peace, to the melding of psy-techniques and human development for nation building. Yet often these initiatives rely on psy-expertise developed in the global North with a Western epistemological and ontological lens. Even cross-cultural psychology often overlooks ontological differences where agents may conceptualise what is called referred to 'psychology', as cosmology (Hague 2012, Viveiros de Castro 2013).

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[4] Both psy-expertise (a term given to various psy disciplines including psychology, psychiatry, community psychology, etc.) and development aim to 'improve' individuals and their lives. The development and humanitarian intervention as a site where relations of power and knowledge intersect with the lived realities of those 'being developed' in the continual process of improvement (Li 2007), is a field marked by contestation, oppression and continued maintenance of unequal relations and structures of power (Ferguson 1994, Mignolo 2011). Psy-expertise is also related to relations of power and improvement, and 'consistent with the political rationalities of neoliberalism' it incites, directs, and instructs people to work on themselves (mentality and behaviour) to become self-governing, self-regulating, 'productive' citizens. Million (2013: 104) details this in the context of North America as a settler colony where "human potential psy-techniques melded with human development philosophies to inform a vision for healing as nation building", for 'therapeutic nations'. Here healing from collective and historical trauma comes to be seen as a requirement for self-governance. Thus, psy-expertise is used in development interventions to promote the development of individual (often neoliberal) subjectivities usually in line with Western modernity.

Intersectionality and Socio-Political Empowerment

When thinking about who can speak and about what, considering intersectionality is critical. Climate justice movements have long been critiqued for not only excluding the voices of young people, People of Colour and global South communities, but also for failing to be led by these critical political actors (Pellow 2016, Taft 2019). The impact of this exclusion is great, including normalising white, global North and adult views on climate action, as well as producing a limited policy agenda which overlooks critical remedies including intergenerational climate justice, as well as racial and reparative justice (Táíwò 2022).

Mainstream Empowerment Imposed Top-Down

The final major failing documented within mainstream empowerment practice is that it is typically imposed in top-down fashion, defined and designed by implementing institutions with little to no input from beneficiaries. This is of course infamously the case with the international development field more broadly, and it has been documented extensively by anthropologists (e.g. Li 2007) and post-development scholars alike (e.g. Escobar, 1995; Klein and Morreo 2019). But with children it is arguably most apparent in efforts to protect them from the supposed dangers of work and migration.

Socio-Economic Empowerment From Above

Samuel Okyere's research on child work and migration speaks directly to the problem of top-down approaches to socio-economic empowerment (2015, 2022). Okyere shows that, inspired by the abolitionist position of the ILO, international organisations working in Ghana frequently attempt to save children from work or migration either a) by forcing them into schools, or b) by running awareness-raising campaigns that 'inform' them of the dangers they may face. Both of these approaches are couched in terms of empowerment – increasing human capital or information. Yet in neither case is anything developed collaboratively with the children concerned, or with their goals and needs in mind. Ironically, then, what we witness are attempts to 'empower' those in positions of relative powerlessness precisely by re-creating their powerlessness through interventions that act on, rather than with, their targets. Predictably, such efforts often fail (see also Howard 2017).

Psychosocial Empowerment From Elsewhere: Psy-Expertise and Child Development

Within international development, psychosocial empowerment interventions almost always deploy constructs from Western psychology on the assumption that these apply universally. This is seriously problematic, since we know from de-colonial and inter-cultural psychology scholarship that even core concepts such as 'self' and 'other' depend for their meaning on their ontological, epistemological and political-economic contexts (Hook 2005, Burman 2007, Teo 2015).

Within the field of child protection, one of the major examples of the problems that can arise from development actors failing to critically interrogate their psychological assumptions comes with efforts to address 'child trafficking'. Emerging in the early 1990s and reaching global prominence in the 2000's, international anti- child trafficking initiatives typically began from the assumption that 'healthy, normal' child development requires children to live at home and form close attachment bonds with their parents. This assumption was rooted in the hugely influential child psychology of Jean Piaget and John Bowlby (see Piaget 1958 and Bowlby 1968), both of whom argued that all children everywhere

develop in the same way and through the same predictable stages. The anti-trafficking policy prescriptions emerging from these assumptions included protecting children from potential trafficking by forcing them to stay at home (where they could safely bond with their parents), sometimes empowering them with school or local work opportunities even if these were un-desired or ineffectual (Howard 2008, 2017). Beyond the documented failure of these prescriptions (including in cases where homes were unsafe for children), what is of greatest significance for the present point is that both Bowlby and Piaget have been widely discredited within critical psychological research for naturalising and universalising class and cultural positionality and privilege, and for arguing that development pathways are universal (e.g. Mann 2001). We now know that this is false, with attachment in many non-Western contexts demonstrably more diffuse and less dependent on the nuclear family than it is in the West, and without any negative developmental consequences arising from this difference (e.g. Scheper-Hughes 1985, Alber 2002).

Socio-Political Empowerment From Above

Finally, we note that top-down approaches to collective political engagement also continue to be a major issue within mainstream empowerment work. Many of the organisations engaged in youth empowerment claim to be 'grass-roots' and 'youth-led', when in fact all important decision-making power rests in adult hands. Once again, this has been documented extensively by Jessica Taft, whose engagement with the Peruvian movement of working children and youth provides a standpoint from which to critically examine the mainstream (2019). We will return to Taft's work and the more radical alternatives to which that points in the final section. It is to this that we now turn.

Part 3: Towards a Power-Informed Empowerment Framework

Where Are We?

This paper has argued that mainstream approaches to empowerment, and indeed mainstream development and humanitarianism as a whole, tend towards the simplistic, the technical and the de-politicising. Empowerment as it is most commonly practiced within this field is heavily individualised, often concentrated narrowly on increasing assets rather than challenging the basis of asset distribution, single-issue focused in a way that ignores both structure and any intersectional understanding of its impacts, a-political, and top-down. This critique applies across all three strands of socio-economic, psychosocial and socio-political empowerment, and it arguably represents such a serious problem that it is gutting the radical meaning of the term empowerment itself.

The obvious question that poses itself in light of this is 'What is going on?' How is it possible that a field of intelligent, well-meaning people committed to what Robert Chambers calls 'good change' (2017) can somehow manage to support social interventions that so often lack radical edge? How can those seemingly intent on fostering social change end up as architects of 'more of the same'? We again believe that the insights of critical and post-development studies may be useful here (e.g. Ferguson 1990, Li 2007, Chalfin 2010, Klein and Morreo 2019), particularly as these have been applied to analysing international child protection (Howard 2017, Cheney and Sinervo 2019, Howard and Okyere 2022).

This literature argues first and foremost that development and humanitarianism have and always have had inherently de-politicising tendencies. That is, they operate fundamentally in order to perfect or alleviate the negative side effects of the social systems that we inhabit, rather than to call into question their foundations or foster challenges to their operation (Kothari and Cooke 2001). This essentially colonial practice means that what is inherently *political* – the distribution of rights, recognition and resources – gets elided from official discourse and action in favour of technical expertise focussed on improvement rather than struggle (Borda-Rodriguez and Lanfranco, 2011). It is for this reason that James Ferguson famously called the development industry an 'anti-politics machine' (1990).

That the development industry operates as an anti-politics machine can partly be explained by the fact that many practitioners see the technical approach to power relations as the *only* approach (Rowlands 2020: 155). That is, they have internalised the dominant story that our current social order cannot radically be altered and thus see their jobs in terms of accommodation instead of overthrow (Žižek 1989, 1994a, 1994b). Naturally, this internalisation is an artefact of the de-politicising mainstream public education systems that most of us go through, but it is also an artefact of the politics of knowledge production and transmission within the development and humanitarian fields themselves. For although these are often well resourced, they structurally fail to establish meaningful research, learning or feedback practices, with the consequence that their planning and learning architecture tends towards the reproduction of established, often conventional, truths and approaches (Howard 2017, Chapter 4; Bourdillon and Myers 2022).

On top of this, the macro and micro operations of power within this field are determining. Plenty of practitioners feel frustration with the work that they do, and more are aware of its limitations. Yet rarely do they have (or feel like they have) the freedom to do anything about it. This is because donors typically allocate funding only for symptom-alleviation as opposed to system overhaul. In addition, they will at times threaten a withdrawal of funds if recipient agencies 'rock the boat' by getting too political. This leads to what we have elsewhere theorised as 'the politics of silence' (Howard 2017), wherein practitioners self-censor or are censored by their superiors for fear of reprimand. This ties with what we call 'the politics of representation' (ibid.): the practice of individuals and institutions representing what they do as appropriate, well thought-out and successful, even in cases where it is not. This twin combination ensures relative systemic stability within the field even when what it does is ineffective.

The challenge for more emancipation-oriented organisations like Tdh is therefore stark: how to push in the direction of more radical, power-informed empowerment initiatives when remaining donor-dependent? How to establish learning regimes that truly allow feedback from 'the ground' and thus evolution? How to foster genuine power-sharing forms of co-creation with project 'beneficiaries' in ways that overturn traditional development practitioner hierarchies as well as the social structures that oppress? These questions have no simple answer, but anthropological studies of development and policy-making, alongside the recent application of complexity theory to the development industry (Ramalingam 2013, Burns and Worsely 2015, Green 2016), all suggest that answers are possible. For although development and humanitarianism tend structurally towards de-politicisation, there are clear chinks in the armour; not all agencies are the same, there are contradictions that can be exposed, and gaps that can be exploited. We will reflect on how that may be done below.

Getting Beyond Where We Are

In pursuing change, and in working towards empowerment, we believe that the following five principles will be important for an organisation seeking to do things differently.

Guiding Principles

1. Working Internally

Challenging development's de-politicising tendencies, including as these relate to empowerment, requires first acknowledging that they exist and second intentionally informing oneself about how and why. For an institution such as Tdh, this means putting in place robust learning architectures that go beyond simple monitoring and evaluation and expose staff to critical scholarship and practice. It further involves actively seeking out diverse, critical perspectives, and creating space (and support) for decolonial, self-reflexive praxis.

2. Working Structurally

'Empowerment' in its initial and most radical form is a dynamic process of individual and collective transformation within the struggle against oppression and inequality. Given that both oppression and inequality are structural phenomena relying on and reproduced by structurally determined power relations, it is essential that empowerment practice both create awareness of and seek to address these

structures and relations. For organisations like Tdh, which have global reach and legitimacy, this has to include working 'upstream', probably with allies, strategically targeting leverage points which could shift system dynamics. Where Tdh continues to do project work that aims to alleviate 'symptoms', it is essential that this be accompanied both by forms of conscientisation and public truth-telling about causes.

3. Working Intersectionally

The matrix of inequality governing our social relations has multiple overlapping dimensions that shape lives differently in different contexts. A person subordinate in one setting along one vector may be dominant in others. Likewise, promoting empowerment in one dimension will have spillover effects in or perhaps stymied by others. Organisations like Tdh need to take intersectional theory and practice seriously, working with stakeholders to address multiple domains of injustice, in particular those identified as a priority by beneficiaries. In addition, it is worth noting that intersectionality is crucial for alliance and movement building, which should be a central element in efforts towards structural change.

4. Working Intergenerationally

Arguably the single most important vector of inequality for children and young people is generation. Power in almost all settings is primarily concentrated in the hands of adults, with the young often systematically excluded from decision-making. Children's rights organisations need to take seriously the idea that young people are human beings and not human 'becomings', who need to be heard *and* listened to within the context of meaningful co-design and power-sharing. This implies a change of internal organisational practice as well as advocacy for change beyond organisational boundaries.

5. Working Collaboratively

Working intergenerationally points in the direction of genuine allyship for organisations like Tdh. This means deep collaboration with the young, the foregrounding of youth agency and decision-making, and substantive autonomy for the young to decide on both 'the issues' and their potential remedies. At the present time, this would likely take the form of a significantly more serious focus on the major existential threat young people face – the climate crisis.

Positive Examples Using the Guiding Principles

With these principles in mind, we turn our attention now towards examples of their deployment.

1. Working Internally: Challenging the Anti-Politics Machine

In her role as Governance Adviser for Oxfam, Jo Rowlands led a consistent effort to promote the practice of power analysis with staff and partners. At an internal level, this involved the constitution of diverse teams occupying multiple different positionalities able to reflexively work through what was missing in institutional practice and what might need to change in order to undo received truths and biases (2020). She writes:

> 'Addressing power deliberately and intentionally to inform understanding of context and processes of strategy and design will open up fresh entry points and enable creative

combinations of approaches, methods and alliances for change. *It will also help us challenge the limits of our own knowledge and identify areas where it is insufficient*' (ibid. 153, emphasis added).

Social movement settings are perhaps more advanced than development organisations at this, in particular those recently emerging movements led by Black feminists, Indigenous groups, and climate activists. Adrienne Maree Brown writes from this perspective in her influential recent book, *Holding Change*, arguing that successful and foundational 'self-work' requires creating space for co-liberation between those who benefit from or are impacted by structural privilege across any given dimension (2021). Institutionally, this points to:

- Reflexivity and truth-telling. Truth-telling is an Indigenous concept utilised in settler colonial contexts for settlers to engage in practices that consider and address the underbelly of colonialism. Similar practices can be replicated by development and humanitarian organisations, to tell the historic and contemporary stories of complicity, failure and aspiration to do more. This also includes holding space for self-reflexivity, as well as time to consolidate practices and narratives that are confronting injustice.

- Embracing a commitment to decoloniality. This includes working towards understanding structures of racial capitalism that have dehumanized people around the world, as well as feeding the expropriative practices underpinning the climate crisis, that will entrench intergenerational injustice in years to come.

- Embracing diversity, through recognising and celebrating that all perspectives contain important wisdom that can contribute to the whole. Given that this work can be deeply challenging, Brown and activist-scholars like her recommend the use of professional mediators and facilitators to guide such processes, developing an internal cadre of self-facilitators along the way. This echoes Freire's foundational work, since Freire argued that no path, or state of 'freedom', 'liberation' or 'emancipation', was predetermined. It was through the development of a critical consciousness that people would find their own way[5].

- Building learning architectures, which make it safe to 'fail forward'. In his pathbreaking book, *Reinventing Organizations* (2014), Frederic Laloux argues that the current paradigm of organisational management assumes that change happens in linear, plannable fashion, which can be operationalised using the classic Logframe followed by standard, possibly course correcting evaluation. This assumption corresponds to insecurity when things go 'wrong' and underpins a desire to pay it safe. By contrast, more agile, future-oriented organisations accept the complexity of social life and encourage ongoing learning, responsiveness to emerging contexts, and the establishment both of a culture of openness and inquiry and the building of information feedback loops that ensure permanent learning including at the highest level of decision-making. Such 'Teal Organisations', as he calls them, are far more likely to have the courage to challenge the strictures of the anti-politics machine and push towards genuine empowerment.

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[5] Clearly, there are issues around the West using empowerment as a way to reproduce itself, which is seen in capitalism in the promise of empowerment through free markets (Harvey 2005), in neo-colonialism and the promise of empowerment through liberal democracy (Mignolo 2011), in statism through the promise of empowerment through the state's management (Wright 2010), and in the patriarchy through the promise of empowerment through equality within predetermined patriarchal structures (Brown 2000, McEwan 2001, Mohanty 2003).

There are by now myriad tools and approaches that have been developed for organisations like Tdh to 'get strategic about getting structural'. John Gaventa's Powercube, mentioned above, is one of the most widely known and used examples, with a recent retrospective finding over 500 citations on Google Scholar and more than '60 publicly available documents where the framework is used in a substantive way' (Gaventa 2021: 120). The Powercube has been used by organisations including Christian Aid, Oxfam GB, and Oxfam International, as well as government agencies including the Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation (SDC) and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida). Its appeal lies in the systematic, codified framework it offers practitioners for thinking about who has which types of power, where, and to what effect. In this respect, it goes beyond standard stakeholder mapping and enables those planning actions, projects or campaigns to get more strategic about what they do.

The Powercube is only one tool among many, which Gaventa himself recognizes. In their important recent book, *Power, Empowerment and Social Change,* Jethro Pettit and Rosemary McGee, document a host of others, including a number used by Jo Rowlands and the Just Associates mentioned above. Likewise, Duncan Green, in his impactful book, *How Change Happens*, promotes the use of the 'Power and Systems Approach' (2016), while in a 2021 paper released by Save the Children US, Bywater et al. convincingly advocate for what they call intersectional, child-centred 'Gender and Power' or GAP analysis. Although their focus is heavily gendered, it is nevertheless worth reproducing one page of this document in its entirety (Bywater et al. 2021: 10), to give a flavour of its radical purpose and intent.

Figure 5: Save the Children US GAP Analysis

WHAT MAKES OUR GAP ANALYSIS UNIQUE?

GAP analysis draws on intersectional feminist theory and approaches, which emphasise gender as a critical power differential that structures social interactions, relations, and institutions in every community and country. It enables an examination of how various systems of oppression overlap and interact with sexism and shape people's life choices, access to resources, and opportunities.

GAP analysis aims to produce both new knowledge and social change. The findings and recommendations from a GAP analysis will inform SC's programming and advocacy. GAP analysis generates evidence that enables the design of programmes that contribute to advancing gender equality and social justice through positively transforming unequal power relations and ensuring all stakeholders can equitably access, participate within, be decision-makers for, and benefit from activities. Through the use of participatory methodologies, including youth and child-led methods, GAP analysis prioritises the knowledge and experiences of communities.

GAP analysis uses a child-centred approach that supports children to freely form and express their views and recognises children as decision-makers, alongside adults. It puts children's safe, meaningful, and equitable participation at the centre and enables us to examine how age discrimination intersects with gender inequality and other forms of oppression. This approach ensures that all girls, boys, and children who identify as non-binary understand and see the results of their participation. Being 'child-centred' does not mean we only engage with children – rather, it requires us to work to improve the systems and structures shaping children's lives by tackling unequal power hierarchies and ensuring duty bearers are accountable and fulfil their child rights obligations.

Ultimately, as Just Associates' Alexa Bradley argues, no matter which tool one chooses to use for empowerment or other work and no matter at which level one uses it:

> 'A power analysis reveals what we are up against, and to what degree we are strategically prepared to push back. It clarifies our points of leverage and influence: where political space for our concerns exists and where it does not; who our allies are; what the defining narratives are on our issues; and the inevitable resistance and hostility to our agendas we will face. Navigating and building power in this way takes time, skill and sustained work. It demands coordination between advocacy efforts and grassroots organising, short- and long-term efforts' (Bradley 2020: 101-102).

3. Working Intersectionally

Given that each of the power tools referred to above explicitly focuses on intersectional analysis and action, we will not dwell further here on how intersectionality may be operationalised. However, we do wish to point to the fact that social movement studies and political theory (e.g. Laclau and Mouffe 1985) both emphasise that building intersectional alliances is essential in successfully struggling for change. In Duncan Green's words, 'interesting things happen when unusual suspects join forces' (2016: 228), and if Tdh and organisations like it are going to push strategically and structurally for radical change, then forging coalitions beyond the usual suspects will be necessary. This is arguably more essential than ever in the face of the climate crisis, which is surely the greatest child protection emergency requiring the most extensive degree of mass mobilisation in the history of our species.

4. Working Intergenerationally: Towards *Protagonismo* and *Colaboraciòn*

In her inspiring 2019 book, *The Kids Are In Charge*, Jessica Taft outlines the difference between mainstream approaches to foster youth empowerment and the unique model rooted in conceptions of intergenerational justice pioneered in the various Latin American movements of working children and youth (see also Taft 2022). Two concepts are essential to this: *Protagonismo* and *Colaboraciòn.*

Taft explains: 'Multi-layered and complex, the concept of children's Protagonismo is practically impossible to translate into a single English word', but it refers to 'the enactment of both individual and collective agency and power' (ibid. 65). Protagonismo emerged as a concept in the 1960s and 70s 'to describe how poor people, neighbourhood groups, women's groups, unions, indigenous groups, and others were claiming space as protagonists, or central actors, on the national political scene' (ibid. 66). Taft continues: 'It described the activism and political agency of these groups, their collective power, and their sense of collective identity as a political bloc. From this lineage, Protagonismo refers to a social group, especially a marginalised social group, coming to see its own significance and claiming space in the political field' (ibid.). For working children, this means seeing 'how children are an oppressed social group that has been excluded from power, often with paternalistic justifications', and it means viewing children as fundamentally equal to adults, 'as social and political subjects with inalienable rights and with their own distinctive knowledge based on lived experiences as children' (ibid.).

Protagonismo manifests in high degrees of autonomy and self-organisation among the many Latin American movements of working children, with cells operating across urban and rural spaces, federating nationally, and running campaigns as well as self-help initiatives for improving young people's lives. Colaboraciòn plays an important role in this work. Taft explains: 'Colaboración is an active practice of working alongside children in which adults try to amplify children's power, agency,

and protagonismo'. The adults who are movement *colaboradores* 'do not do things for children, nor act on children's behalf, but instead act in egalitarian partnership with children, building relationships based on solidarity rather than paternalism' (ibid 66-67). This is an expanded form of allyship that requires ongoing internal work among adults and children to challenge internalised assumptions about childhood, adulthood and relative rights and capacities. It also requires sustained commitment and ongoing practices of mutual feedback and facilitation.

The difference between this and more standard approaches to child protection and empowerment is so stark that Taft characterizes it as both 'intergenerational activism' and an 'alternative to child saving' (2022). We would argue that where mainstream youth empowerment practice tends towards the child saving end of the spectrum, the future of radical empowerment for organisations like Tdh must lie in intergenerational activism. Pivoting towards becoming a cadre of *colaboradores* would be a radical and field-defining departure. And once again, the climate crisis offers an opportunity, since child and youth-led movements are mushrooming all over the world, calling for allies to support in saving their future.

5. Working Collaboratively: From Psychosocial Empowerment to Liberation Psychology

Our final point also relates to the importance of collaboration, and in order to make it will take a detour from psychosocial empowerment to liberation psychology (see Tully 2002). We can begin again with Paolo Freire. As discussed in Part 1, Freire's life work was about helping people who he termed the 'oppressed' to understand their subjugation. Freire did this through a process he named conscientisation (conscientização); the collaborative development of critical consciousness to contest and shift oppression (Freire 1970). Salvadorian Ignacio Martín-Baró drew heavily on Freire's work. Spanish-born and a Jesuit priest, Martín-Baró completed his psychology PhD in Chicago before moving to El Salvador. It was here where Martín-Baró worked towards deconstructing much of what he knew of American psychology, finding it insufficient to speak to the poor and marginalized with whom he worked. He criticised the American psychological canon for its positivist epistemology, uncompromising individualism, hedonistic focus, homeostatic vision, and ahistoricalism (Martín-Baró 1994). Martín-Baró's El Salvador was ruled by a brutal regime, a regime which eventually ordered his death by firing squad, shooting him in cold blood in the middle of the night. In life and similar to Freire, Martín-Baró went about developing what he understood as liberation psychology. In his approach, people were to collaboratively develop critical consciousness through collectively remembering history: 'to discover selectively, through collective memory, those elements of the past which have proved useful in the defence of the interest of exploited classes and which may be applied to the present struggles to increase [conscientisation]' (Borda 1988: 95). Next, Martín-Baró called for the 'de-ideologizing of everyday experience' through this consciousness, before finally calling people to use their virtues and solidarity to work towards the collective good.

Similar processes of collaborative, collective psychological resistance were part of the overturning of apartheid in South Africa. The Black Consciousness movement, led by Steve Biko, used psychological discourse to resist oppression and domination, through striving to undo the negative image stamped in the minds of black South Africans by years of colonial subjugation, and replacing this with a positive, self-affirming, proud image. Influenced by the writings of Paolo Freire, Biko saw 'mental emancipation [as] a precondition to political emancipation' (Biko, 1979 cited in Hook 2005: 489).

Indigenous knowledges have likewise provided an important, liberatory source of resistance and healing for Indigenous populations in Australia. Indigenous psychologies across Australia carry a specific spiritual element and relationships with the land and nature, the importance of kin and social networks, and the need to live in congruence with one's beliefs. The spiritual and cultural element is not just significant to self-determination, but also as a way for people to heal from oppression (Dudgeon and Pickett 2000). In her research into the healing strategies of remote aboriginal communities, Feeney (2009: 10) describes healing as 'a journey of empowerment, reclaiming control and self-determination'. Dudgeon et al. (2012: 69) similarly describe healing as 'a spiritual understanding of self, identity, love, belonging, family, security, hurt, heartache, good times, laughter and our connection to land. Having hope and finding acceptance based on love and respect, of understanding of ourselves, our supports and being able to tell "our" stories'. Koolmatrie and Williams (2000) outline specific ways of healing for Indigenous peoples who have undergone trauma, with a heavy focus on telling stories that raise critical consciousness of colonialism and coloniality.

What these approaches show is first and foremost is an alternative to the individualisation and de-politicisation of Western psychological expertise, including as it is deployed within mainstream empowerment (Rimke 2011). At work here are processes of reclamation and resistance against continued dislocation and oppression. It is important to note that reclamation does not mean the promotion of untouched, unchanged knowledge – what Derek Hook terms a 'unified psychology of [indigenous or] black essence' (2005: 489). Differently, reclamation accepts hybridity and yet is primarily focused on 'disrupting historical experiences of oppression and marginality' (ibid.), including by valorising hidden or subordinate knowledges or ways of being. These approaches all link critical consciousness with liberation, which in turn links to action (Hook 2005).Yet, crucially, the 'script' of liberation and action remains unwritten, for as Freire took pains to argue, it is through the constructive and healing nature of deliberation that the 'oppressed' will find answers for themselves.

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